

Bear Creek Council • Defenders of Wildlife • Gallatin Wildlife Association • Greater Yellowstone Coalition • National Parks Conservation Association • Natural Resources Defense Council • Yellowstone Buffalo Foundation • Wildlife Conservation Society

March 19, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and individual, we are writing to urge you to vote no on Senate Bill 337, a bill that will prohibit Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks from relocating bison from the state-federal bison quarantine to appropriate habitat in Montana other than the National Bison Range in Moiese.

Yellowstone bison are highly valued wildlife in Montana and the nation at large. Our organizations support wildlife restoration projects and the goal of restoring bison populations to appropriate North American landscapes.

The protocol applied to the bison quarantine program is more rigorous than any ever attempted for wild or domestic animals. It was developed through extensive scientific review by experts in all of the agencies associated with the Greater Yellowstone Interagency Brucellosis Committee and reviewed by the United States Animal Health Association. Bison ready for release from the quarantine facility have met and exceeded all standards for bison or cattle published in the APHIS Uniform Methods & Rules.

There is considerable interest in Montana, throughout the western United States, and in Mexico and Canada to restore bison populations – and given that Yellowstone bison are genetically pure (no cattle genes have been detected in the population) – they are coveted for restoration efforts.

Native American tribes in Montana and elsewhere have a high interest in maintaining cultural traditions related to bison, and Yellowstone bison are especially valued by tribes. FWP is currently completing the environmental analysis to allow bison in quarantine to be transferred to the Northern Arapaho Tribe on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. Also, in Montana, Fort Peck and Fort Belknap have expressed interest in receiving quarantined bison in the future.

Senate Bill 337 is a step backward in managing and conserving wild bison in Montana. It is not in the best interest of Montana, the nation, wildlife conservation or the livestock industry to pass Senate Bill 337. If it is defeated, the Montana legislature will be saying it supports science-based wildlife conservation; Montanans and other states and countries eager to restore bison will applaud Montana for its role in the restoration of an important and symbolic wildlife species in the West. However, if the legislature passes this bill it will succeed in giving Montana yet another black eye.

Please vote No on Senate Bill 337.

Respectfully,

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(over)

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